



Report: Few high school grads ready for college

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) -- Fewer than one in four high school graduates who took the ACT test have taken the coursework necessary to succeed in college, according to a report released Thursday by the not-for-profit company that administers the college entrance exam.

The report by ACT Inc. showed that only 22 percent of the 1.2 million high school graduates who took the exam this year were ready for college coursework in math, English and science. The number of students tested accounted for about 40 percent of the total number of 2004 high school graduates, said Ken Gullette, spokesman for the Iowa City-based education company.

"Students need to understand that if they're planning on being successful in college and the workplace, they need to be very serious in high school and take the most challenging courses they can take," Gullette said.

ACT uses benchmarks to assess a student's chances of success in college.

A student is likely to earn a grade of C or higher in the testing areas if he or she receives a score of 18 in English, 22 in math and 24 in science, Gullette said. The scores are out of a possible 36.

Gullette said fewer students are taking the core curriculum courses important for college readiness -- outlined by government reports as four years of English and three years each of math, science and social studies.

The number of students taking core curriculum courses in high school rose from 43 percent in the 1980s to more than 60 percent in the late 1990s, but that number has since declined to 56 percent, Gullette said.

Phil Caffrey, senior associate director of admissions at Iowa State University, said there has been concern that "a growing number of students are not taking the rigorous college prep courses."

Many students think they can "cruise" senior year, Caffrey said.

"Math is sort of like a foreign language. If you don't stay familiar with it, you'll lose a lot of what you've learned," he said.

The ACT report recommends that measures be taken even before high school to help prepare students for college.

"Many students in K-8 aren't learning the foundational skills they need to take challenging courses when they get to high school," Gullette said. "Once you get to high school, if you're not prepared to take challenging courses, it's almost too late."

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